

he reserves a special place in his heart for the House Democracy Partnership, often forgoing travel to more glamorous destinations in order to escort our commission to countries such as Liberia, Afghanistan and Timor Leste, where the need for the kind of institutional support we can provide is the greatest.

On these trips, Major Koumparakis has not only excelled as an expert travel coordinator, diplomat and logistician, he has also established himself as an adviser to HDP's work, and an integral part of our programming with partner legislatures. And, of course, he has demonstrated his legendary ability to solve problems and deliver results in the most difficult circumstances.

Let me give one striking example. On one occasion last year, we had a particularly ambitious around-the-world itinerary that included a stop in Hungary to commemorate the fall of the Iron Curtain followed by working visits with the legislatures of Mongolia, Indonesia and Timor Leste. But, unfortunately, our arrival in Budapest was delayed twice by a vote on a major bill here and then weather. By the time we were finally bound for Mongolia, we had nearly exhausted our window to pass through Chinese air space. We faced the prospect of having to divert our mission and forgo the opportunity to make progress with the Mongolian parliament. Well, Major Koumparakis came to the rescue. Working literally through the night, he somehow managed to persuade an official of the U.S. Embassy in Beijing to rouse a Chinese official at his personal residence, on a weekend, no less, and call in a favor to get us the clearance we needed. That is an anecdote that says a lot about the major. It is a small example of his dedication and creativity and good humor. He has just been an indispensable member of the House Liaison Office, and he leaves some very large shoes to fill.

Now in recognition of his service and leadership potential, he has been assigned to what can only be assigned as a hardship billet in Buenos Aires, Argentina, where he will attend a command and staff program at the Argentine Naval War College. As he departs Capitol Hill for this next step in his career, we bid him farewell with heartfelt respect and admiration.

RECOGNIZING MAJOR SPEROS KOUNPARAKIS

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under a previous order of the House, the gentleman from California (Mr. DREIER) is recognized for 5 minutes.

Mr. DREIER. Madam Speaker, I would like to yield for him to conclude his remarks to the very distinguished chairman of the House Democracy Partnership and the Appropriations Subcommittee on Homeland Security.

Mr. PRICE of North Carolina. I thank the gentleman. I will be very brief, but I do want to add a word.

Mr. DREIER. Absolutely. I would say that the gentleman has used all of my talking points, so the challenge for me will be following the completion of his remarks.

Mr. PRICE of North Carolina. The gentleman is never at a loss for talking points. I am assured of that. We do need to say something, and I want to do it, acknowledging Major Koumparakis's wife Bree, who also deserves our gratitude and our respect for supporting her husband through 3 long years of early hours and frequent travels and an uncertain schedule. She shows a lot of the same dedication and selflessness that the major himself does. And we are just hopeful that this new assignment in Buenos Aires is going to offer her some light at the end of the tunnel, just as it will the major.

Mr. DREIER. Madam Speaker, I thank the gentleman, and let me just say at the outset that it is very important to note that Major Koumparakis is going to be going to Buenos Aires by way of California. He is going to be going for language training to Monterey, California.

Let me say that my very good friend, Mr. PRICE, has talked about the importance of Speros' work in dealing with the missions that have been put forth by this House, and specifically the House Democracy Partnership. And I would just like to say that when we look at the work of our partnership, Madam Speaker, one of the very important things to note is the fact that we have gone to, as Mr. PRICE indicated, some of the most troubled spots in the world. When I think about trips to Ulan Bator, Mongolia; Monrovia, Liberia; Nairobi, Kenya; and clearly Kabul, Afghanistan, the notion of congressional travel is one where I think the perception is that most travel takes place in other spots, when in fact this House Democracy Partnership has been focused on a very important mission.

Four years ago this spring when I had the privilege of beginning with Mr. PRICE this partnership and took on the task of putting together the countries with which we were going to partner in working to build the parliaments, I at the very outset looked to the United States Marine Corps. Now for full disclosure, I have to say I am very partial. My father, sometimes I regretted this, Madam Speaker, but my father was a drill instructor in the United States Marine Corps. I regretted it the first 18 years of my life especially, but I survived it. One of the things that happened when I first had the opportunity to chair the House Democracy Partnership, I made the decision that we wanted to have the United States Marine Corps play the important role of orchestrating and leading with the assistance that only they could provide these efforts.

Frankly, as we looked, Madam Speaker, at the task that was before us, it was very appropriate for the United States Marine Corps, and up until now with the departure of Deputy

Director Koumparakis, among other great people who have served in the past, to take this task on because the United States Marine Corps are in fact on duty in embassies throughout the world. They are on the frontline in those embassies and play a very important role. And I happen to believe—well, I will say this. Many of the other branches, with all due respect to every single one of them, approached me and said that they wanted to play a role in doing this. And I said the answer was yes, they could, as long as they enlisted in the United States Marine Corps.

So I can't say enough about Speros Koumparakis and the work he has done and the effort that the United States Marine Corps has put into especially the House Democracy Partnership.

What we have done, Madam Speaker, as Mr. PRICE said, 15 countries, 15 countries around the world, new and re-emerging democracies, where we have had the task of trying to help them take these fragile democracies and build their parliaments. When we think about it, it is very important to recognize that our relationship is so often simply with the head of state. But if we are going to build up democratic institutions, there is none more important than parliaments that have independence and a very, very good grasp and an opportunity for oversight at the executive branch. And Speros regularly understood that and played a key role in making sure that the House Democracy Partnership could complete its mission.

And so, Madam Speaker, I simply want to join with my colleague, Mr. PRICE, in extending congratulations to Speros and to Bree. I know they are going to continue that very fine service to the United States of America in their work both in California and in Buenos Aires, and we look forward to getting great reports on him.

SOBERING REPORT ON AFGHANISTAN

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under a previous order of the House, the gentleman from California (Ms. WOOLSEY) is recognized for 5 minutes.

Ms. WOOLSEY. Madam Speaker, last week the Pentagon released its 6-month status update on the war in Afghanistan. It is a sobering report indeed, one that should make all of us question the very legitimacy of this mission.

There has been a huge uptick in violence, including a 240 percent increase in roadside bomb attacks. The Karzai government's support has sunk to embarrassing lows as more than 80 percent of Afghan citizens say government corruption has an impact on their lives and barely one in four Afghans rate U.S. and NATO forces as "good" or "very good."

This isn't LYNN WOOLSEY or the Congressional Progressive Caucus talking at this moment, this is a report from